

Coordination with Education Officials

Goal: Provide Quality, Individualized Services

The Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) works cooperatively with local school districts, the Department of Education, the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, parent/student transition groups, and the Department of Labor to provide vocational rehabilitation services to eligible students as they transition from school to the adult world. The goals of the agencies include provision of quality, individualized services to students with disabilities and to facilitate the transition into adulthood smoothly.

Rehabilitation counselors occasionally face barriers when providing services to students with disabilities. At times, potentially eligible students are not referred to SBVI in time for the transition services to be done smoothly and thoroughly. Counselors are removing these barriers by ongoing contacts with special education teachers and directors to make them aware of vocational rehabilitation services and the role of vocational rehabilitation in assisting students to prepare for jobs and careers. In response to public comments concerning transition service issues, the Division of SBVI will continue to address transition as a priority.

Cooperative Agreement: Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities

Historically, the transition from school to adult life has left students with disabilities ill-prepared for independent living, work and post-secondary education. The lack of involvement of vocational rehabilitation and transition services has led to individuals with more significant disabilities to be served through sheltered workshops and activity centers. Studies of students with disabilities graduating from secondary schools indicate that the majority were under or unemployed, socially inactive, and still living at home with their parents. This lack of knowledge, resources, and skills demonstrated by these graduates often results in continued dependence upon society as well as the loss of potential human resources. Current philosophies and technologies are challenging our past "best practices" as we re-evaluate the potential contributions of citizens with disabilities.

South Dakota's human service agencies and education system have accepted the challenge, and have forged a strong coalition to implement the necessary changes. This agreement presents a common policy and conceptual framework for addressing interagency transition planning at the local level, thus insuring that youth with disabilities have access to the services and resources needed to enter adult life (and the world of work) successfully. Cooperating agencies will benefit from maximum coordination of services, more efficient utilization of agency resources, increased service options, and improved interagency communication.

Agencies covered by this agreement include SBVI, the Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Education, the Division of Mental Health, the Division of Developmental Disabilities, and the Department of Social Services. A matrix of services is provided in the agreement which outlines each agency's responsibility for provision of services at specific ages throughout a student's transition from school to work.

The collaborating state agencies strongly believe, endorse, and support the following policy statements. It is the policy of South Dakota's human service agencies and education system that:

- All South Dakota citizens, including youth with disabilities, will have opportunities for full participation in work and community life;
- All human services systems in South Dakota will assist individuals to achieve independence and self-sufficiency, and
- All human services systems in South Dakota recognize organized constituent groups of persons with disabilities as a primary sources of information for program development by consulting with and advising such groups.

The agreement outlines who should be involved in a student's IEP, the importance of maintaining confidentiality, the need for training, and the responsibilities of each participating agency. The Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired agrees to:

1. Establish a referral process ensuring that school personnel are aware of the referral process, eligibility requirements and scope of vocational rehabilitation services.
2. Meet with local education agency personnel to identify potential referrals as is necessary.
3. Offer an application for services on any youth with disabilities who is 16 years of age or younger if appropriate.
4. Determine eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services within 60 days of application unless the applicant grants an extension or the applicant receives a trial work experience.
5. Participate in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for students determined eligible, when appropriate.
6. Complete an IPE with each eligible student on a timely basis, but no later than prior to the student's exit from the school system.
7. Assist students in making a career choice consistent with the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and the informed choice of the eligible individual.
8. Purchase vocational evaluation and diagnostic services when needed for vocational purposes and not available from the school.

9. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to students in the course of transition to competitive employment taking into consideration any other services or benefits for which the student might be eligible.
10. When job placement, job coaching or follow-along services are being purchased by SBVI, the consumer will be offered a choice of providers available to provide these services.
11. Offer local education agencies the opportunity to enter into a cooperative agreement to participate in Project Skills.
12. Sponsor qualified SBVI consumers in the annual Youth Leadership Forum.

Memorandum Of Understanding Between The South Dakota Department Of Human Services And The South Dakota Board Of Regents

This Memorandum of Understanding between the South Dakota Department of Human Services and the South Dakota Board of Regents defines the administrative responsibility and financial accountability with respect to the provision of reasonable accommodations for vocational rehabilitation consumers in a post-secondary education programs.

The need for this Memorandum of Understanding arises out of the need to clarify the responsibility for auxiliary aids and services when the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act are applicable. This Memorandum of Understanding applies only to those situations where a vocational rehabilitation consumer is entitled to accommodations from one of the six universities under the authority of the Board of Regents, and it applies only to accommodations that would be required for students with disabilities who are not consumers of Vocational Rehabilitation.

For a number of years, the South Dakota vocational rehabilitation programs in the Department of Human Services have assumed full burden of financial responsibility for auxiliary services as part of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). With the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, it is necessary for agencies to ensure that an interagency agreement or other mechanism for interagency coordination takes effect between public institutions of higher education and the designated state units for vocational rehabilitation.

The Board of Regents agrees that the institutions governed by the Board of Regents are subject to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992. As such, these institutions have obligations to provide reasonable accommodations to students as specified by law. The Board of Regents agrees that the institutions governed by the Board of Regents will pay twenty-one and three-tenths percent (21.3 %) in non-federal funds of the costs of

reasonable accommodations for consumers of vocational rehabilitation attending their programs.

The South Dakota vocational rehabilitation programs agree that their own responsibilities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992 are to provide auxiliary aids and services necessary to make rehabilitation programs accessible. The vocational rehabilitation programs within the Department of Human Services agree to pay seventy eight and seven-tenths percent (78.7%) in federal funds of the cost of reasonable accommodations for consumers of vocational rehabilitation attending one of the universities under the control of the Board of Regents.

Memorandum of Understanding between SBVI and the School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

This agreement assures coordination of services between SBVI and the School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SDSBVI) to ensure that students who are blind and visually impaired receive effective, seamless services as they make the transition from school to adult life and employment.

SBVI and SDSBVI share information with students, parents, and local school districts about the importance of the skills of blindness to the success of students in the world of work. SBVI is an active participant in the transition planning process and participates in IEP meetings for students as early as age 14. For those students enrolled at SDSBVI, SBVI representatives will also attend pre-staffing meetings when appropriate. SBVI helps to determine appropriate vocational direction by providing work experiences and vocational counseling and guidance. The MOU clearly outlines that SBVI will attempt to have an IPE in place for every eligible student prior to graduation.

SDSBVI has a responsibility to all South Dakota resident students with visual impairments under the age of twenty-one. For students of "transition age" between 14 and 21, that responsibility is shared with SBVI. SDSBVI employs a transition specialist through a cooperative agreement with SBVI and has outreach consultants that work with students, families, schools, and SBVI staff on a state wide basis. In addition, SBVI works with the liaisons from the Transition Services Liaison Project to provide additional technical assistance and training to students with disabilities, families, local education agencies and adult service agencies. These trained professionals collaborate to perform transition planning and provide the consultation necessary to promote a smooth transition for students from the educational setting to enter or prepare for employment.

Both SBVI and SDSBVI personnel are involved in transition services and regularly discuss mutual efforts and plan appropriate activities to benefit students and family members. A sharing of information takes place due to coordinated efforts between the SBVI Board and SDSBVI Advisory Council. Summer programs are coordinated to allow students to benefit from both SBVI and SDSBVI activities, and students are encouraged to participate in the Youth Leadership Forum, which is a week long seminar intended to prepare high school age youth to be community leaders and self advocates. All entities have been involved in planning the program, interviewing students, interviewing project staff and funding program activities.

Plans to facilitate transition services of students with disabilities

SBVI continues to explore and expand transition services available to students with visual disabilities. The quality, as well as the quantity of services have increased over the last year and will continue to be expanded to better meet student needs. SBVI is committed to provide quality services in order to ensure a smooth and thorough transition into the adult world. SBVI believes that there should be an increased emphasis on independence, the importance of matching a person to a career that they are passionate about, and the potential of a mentoring program that will assist transition age consumers in making wise decisions on their future.